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SUBJECT: Australians Moonstruck over Apollo 11 Anniversary

11. (U) SUMMARY: The 40th anniversary of Apollo 11 moon landing generated much excitement and good will throughout Australia, but especially in the Canberra region, where tracking stations 40 years ago played a crucial role in broadcasting the video images of Neil Armstrong's first steps onto the lunar surface. Over several weeks, the anniversary celebrations and extensive media coverage provided many opportunities to reinforce the shared aspirations and achievements of the Australian-American alliance and to promote Australia's unique contribution to the mission. Highlights of the celebration included a visit by retired space shuttle astronaut Jim Reilly, a four-day reunion of moon landing tracking alumni, the release of a new 50-cent Apollo coin, and the Australian premiere of a new documentary on moonwalkers, "The Wonder of it All".
END SUMMARY

12. (U) The Apollo 11 anniversary was celebrated across Australia and characterized by the media as one of the most significant events in human history. Many Australians view the success of the moon landing as their own and take undeniable pride in their role in it, which was portrayed (although not entirely accurately) in the movie "The Dish". As one of the trackers put it: "We were on the forefront of one of greatest human endeavors ever from the Australian bush." Museums, libraries, astronomy and space groups, school science programs and the media used the occasion to revisit the successes and the challenges of the space program, particularly Australia's contribution and to look ahead to future missions to the moon and Mars. Embassy Canberra was invited to play a role in many of the key events to underscore our appreciation and recognition of Australia's contributions. The U.S. Mission in Australia thanks NASA and its current and former engineers and astronauts for supporting events highlighting Australia's role as partner in space exploration.

ASTRONAUT BIG HIT

13. (U) In the week prior to the anniversary, retired space shuttle astronaut Jim Reilly shared his enthusiasm for space exploration with a wide range of audiences in programs in Adelaide, Melbourne and Canberra. Reilly was in Australia to teach as part of the annual Young Astronauts Space Schools Australia program in Adelaide, but agreed to Embassy requests to extend his public outreach. That included a talk on what its like to be an astronaut that fired the imaginations of more than 100 school children and their parents at the Canberra Deep Space Communications Center, a discussion of future space travel to a packed house of 200 academics at Australia National University and its Jet Propulsion Lab, a special meet and greet for Embassy employees and families, and an introduction of the film "Race for the Moon", the story of the Apollo 8, to 200 members of the public at the National Library. He was a favorite with the media with The (Melbourne) Age, Canberra Times, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio and TV, and several morning drive time shows among those who gave him extensive coverage. Reilly's friendly and approachable style was a perfect vehicle for sharing the wonder of space exploration.

14. (U) During the week of the anniversary, the Embassy was invited to play key roles in several reunion events in Canberra for Australians who worked for NASA or other agencies as part of the space program. Tracking stations at Parkes, Tidbinbilla and Honeysuckle Creek, Muchea, Island Lagoon and Carnavon were part of

NASA's program to send and receive signals to space. Ultimately, it was the small Honeysuckle Creek station that broadcast the first 8 minutes of the steps on the moon after the walk began ahead of schedule, producing what one veteran called "the greatest show on earth."

CHARG THANKS AUSTRALIANS

15. (U) Charg d'Affaires Dan Clune joined Kim Carr, Australia's Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research; Megan Clark, CEO of the country's science and research program CSIRO, and Senator Annette Hurley at a ceremony at Tidbinbilla on July 20. The event marked the retirement of DSS-46 - "The Dish" (famous from the film of the same name) which captured the first video and audio from Tranquility Base. The antenna (which was incorrectly identified in the movie as being located in Parkes) was built at Honeysuckle Creek, but later moved to the Canberra Deep Space Communications Center in Tidbinbilla. The Charg thanked the Australians who worked on the space program and read a personal letter from Neil Armstrong to the crews who supported Apollo 11 on its historic flight. The Charg was interviewed by Channel 7 news and had the chance to again to highlight the important role Australians played in the Apollo program and mention U.S. plans to return to the moon.

16. (U) On July 21 (the actual anniversary in Australia), the Charg was among the keynote speakers at a special luncheon attended by more than 300 people. A highlight of that event was the replaying of historic audio and video tapes to coincide with the actual timing of the landing. The Australian Mint unveiled a new 50-cent coin commemorating the moon landing and Charg Clune presented seed packages from the Moon Sycamore trees to the capitol district's head gardener. The seeds, which are part of an American Forests project, were harvested from Sycamore trees that were germinated from seeds taken to the moon by astronaut Stuart Roosa on Apollo 14. The young saplings will be replanted at various locations around Australia, including the American Embassy. The presentation of the seeds garnered media interest from both print and radio and served as a symbol of our continuing friendship.

17. (U) On July 24, NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory's Wayne Lee, who is overseeing the design of the Altair Lunar Lander for the Constellation lunar program, gave a presentation at Canberra's Questacon science facility to an audience of approximately 150 on NASA's plans for a return to the moon. Space aficionados, current and former employees of the Tidbinbilla tracking station, head of the GOA's new space policy unit, and numerous children were spellbound by his enthusiastic description of the Constellation program. Lee, hosted during his trip by the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, took questions that ranged from technical attempts to better existing vehicles to concerns about weaponization of outer space and the justification for returning humans to the moon. Following the program, Lee was swamped by a crowd of space enthusiasts and was last seen engaged in detailed technical descriptions of NASA's designs and the technology needed to get safely to the moon and back. He gave similar presentations in Sydney and Melbourne areas.

MEDIA ATTENTION

18. (U) Throughout the month, major newspapers ran inserts or souvenir editions. Across all media there were retrospectives - documenting coverage of the events alongside personal accounts of reactions at the time. 'Where were you?' segments were particularly popular on radio and television. Talk shows used the opportunity to run segments on other cultural highlights of the time - in music, film, literature and popular culture. Sky News Australia (a subscription television channel), the BBC and ABC TV and radio dedicated programming to the historic event and its contributions to scientific advancement. The weatherman on the Nine (TV) network's breakfast show 'Today' highlighted the occasion by doing his show in an authentic NASA astronaut suit that subsequently became a prize in a viewer contest. Australia's Public Affairs channel A-PAC TV (modeled on C-SPAN) broadcast several features on the Apollo 11 mission and replayed footage from the local moon landing celebrations on the weekend. The release of new and restored footage (and the successful Endeavour lift-off) further encouraged television coverage. Online offerings included rolling photo

galleries and collections of video, audio, photographs and articles.

¶9. (U) The celebrations will continue this week with the Australian premiere of a new documentary, "The Wonder of it All", which features interviews with 8 of the 12 men who walked on the moon in Embassy-sponsored showings in Sydney and Melbourne and at the Brisbane Film Festival. Producer Jeffrey Roth will be on hand to introduce his film.

¶10. (U) Comment: The celebrations of the Apollo 11 landings has taken place on a global scale, and have echoed the global impact of that event. Australia, however, enjoys a privileged place as an Qthat event. Australia, however, enjoys a privileged place as an active, and crucial, partner with our space program. While most Australians realize that Australia will never have a true space program of its own, they take great pride in serving as the anchor in the southern hemisphere for the most advanced elements of our ongoing exploration of space. The idea of working alongside NASA and the U.S. (as well as the EU and Japan) on space exploration adds tremendously to Australian views of the overall relationship. End Comment.

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